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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

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SUBJECT: PA CONCERNED ABOUT ENHANCED GOI RESTRICTIONS ON
PALESTINIAN PRISONERS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. PA Minister of Prisoners' Affairs Ashraf al-Ajrami complained to ConGen political specialist that recent Israeli Prison Service (IPS) decisions are undermining the PA's standing among prisoners and the Palestinian public. He pointed to an IPS prohibition on the entry of 16 tons of sweets to Palestinian prisoners celebrating the Eid al-Fitr in Israeli prisons, new restrictions on the transfer of money to prisoners, and a prohibition on senior-year students in prison studying science, chemistry and physics for their final high school exams. PM Salam Fayyad raised similar concerns with the Consul General in a meeting on October 18. End Summary.

Eid al-Fitr Sweets Prohibited

¶2. (C) PA Minister of Prisoners' Affairs Ashraf al-Ajrami told ConGen political specialist that on October 11 the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) prohibited the entry of 16 tons of sweets to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons during Eid al-Fitr citing security and health concerns. Al-Ajrami said in past years, the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs (MoPA) coordinated with the IPS to deliver Ramadan sweets to Israeli prisons and Israeli-controlled West Bank prisons. PM Fayyad, who complained to the Consul General about this on October 18, noted that there were no health and security concerns when the previous Hamas-led PA provided sweets to the prisoners a year ago.

Money Transfers Regulated

¶3. (C) Al-Ajrami also expressed concern that the IPS imposed new restrictions in late September on the transfer of money to Palestinian criminal and security prisoners. (Note: Security prisoners are those imprisoned for political party affiliation or "security reasons" and number roughly 11,500. There are roughly 1,200 criminal prisoners. End Note) Al-Ajrami said under the new regulations the MoPA can transfer 250 NIS (USD 62.50) monthly to each prisoner. Previously, the MoPA transferred money only to security prisoners (not criminals) and could send unlimited sums of money through the Israeli post to select faction leaders who distributed the funds.

¶4. (C) MoPA Undersecretary Ziad Ibrahim and the MoPA Director General told ConGen political specialist that al-Ajrami initially accepted the new regulations, but was pressured by senior Fatah officials and imprisoned Fatah members to change his mind. Al-Ajrami said he asked GoI Minister of Internal Security Avi Dichter to make concessions for the prisoners, but "the Israeli government is doing

everything in its power to make things difficult for us."

Study of Sciences Prohibited in Prison

15. (C) Al-Ajrami said the IPS, citing security risks, recently prohibited senior-year students in prison from studying science, chemistry and physics to prepare for final high school exams. Al-Ajrami noted that for over fifteen years, seniors in prison have studied all subjects, including the sciences.

New Regulations Undermine Minister's Standing

16. (C) Al-Ajrami said new restrictions on Palestinian prisoners undermine the standing of the PA among prisoners and the Palestinian public. He added that the GOI had blocked his recent attempt to visit jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, despite his request to Dichter.

WALLES